

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 DHA-02 TRSE-00 /070 W
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R 140741Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9572
INFO AMEMBASSY BERN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT NL
SUBJECT: THE MENTEN AFFAIR - CONTINUED

REF: THE HAGUE 6448

1. THE SAGA OF PIETER MENTEN, WEALTHY ART COLLECTOR AND SUSPECTED WAR CRIMINAL, CONTINUES TO DOMINATE THE DUTCH MEDIA. MENTEN WAS ARRESTED ON DECEMBER 7 AFTER "ACCENT" REPORTER HANS KNOOP, ONE OF HIS MOST DILIGENT PURSUERS, WAS TIPPED OFF THAT THE FUGITIVE AND HIS WIFE WERE STAYING AT A MOTEL NEAR ZURICH. EVEN FROM A SWISS JAIL CELL, MENTEN HAS MANAGED TO KEEP THE DUTCH POLITICAL POT BOILING.

2. JUSTICE MINISTER ANDREAS VAN AGT, WHO ENDURED THE BRUNT OF CRITICISM FOR MENTEN'S ELEVENTH-HOUR ESCAPE LAST MONTH, FLEW TO SWITZERLAND SOON AFTER THE ARREST TO CONFER WITH HIS SWISS COUNTERPART KURT FURGLER. VAN AGT'S ATTEMPT THUS TO REASSERT HIS CONTROL OVER THE MATTER BACKFIRED SOMEWHAT WHEN HE WAS FORCED TO CONCEDE THE UNCERTAINTY OF MENTEN'S EVENTUAL RETURN TO HOLLAND. BECAUSE EXTRADITION SEEMED TO BE

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RULED OUT, VAN AGT'S BEST HOPE FOR A FAVORABLE SOLUTION WAS

THAT THE SWISS WILL DEPORT MENTEN TO HOLLAND UNDER A 1965 GOVERNMENT DECREE CONCERNING WAR CRIMINALS. A SOURCE AT THE SWISS EMBASSY HERE TELLS US THAT THE CABINET CONSIDERED THE MATTER TODAY AND WILL DO SO AGAIN ON FRIDAY, DEC 17.

3. THE QUESTION OF WHO TIPPED OFF MENTEN ON NOVEMBER 14 ABOUT HIS IMPENDING ARREST ALSO PROMISES TO KEEP THE CASE IN THE NEWS. MENTEN'S WIFE TOLD AN INTERVIEWER THAT HER HUSBAND HAD BEEN WARNED BY A "VERY HIGH AUTHORITY." MENTEN HIMSELF SENT A LENGTHY LETTER TO VAN AGT IN WHICH HE ALLEGEDLY NAMED THE GUILTY PARTY. VAN AGT HAS PASSED THE LETTER TO THE HAGUE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR WHO IS INVESTIGATING THE ESCAPE.

4. THE EFFECT THAT THE AFFAIR WILL HAVE ON VAN AGT'S POLITICAL FUTURE IS UNRESOLVED. THE CATHOLIC JUSTICE MINISTER EMERGED AS A PIVOTAL FIGURE IN DUTCH POLITICS WHEN HE WAS NAMED LIST LEADER OF THE CRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC APPEAL (CDA), A POTENTIALLY POWERFUL BUT STILL SHAKY AND UNTESTED LIAISON OF CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT PARTIES. AN ANONYMOUS ARTICLE IN THE PRESTIGIOUS "NRC HANDELSBLAD" ACCUSED VAN AGT OF NEGLIGENCE IN THE CASE, CLAIMING THAT HE LEFT A REPORT ON MENTEN'S FORTHCOMING ARREST UNREAD ON HIS DESK FOR TEN DAYS. CHARGES THAT VAN AGT IS PART OF A 30 YEAR OLD CATHOLIC CONSPIRACY TO PROTECT FORMER NAZIS MAY STRAIN THE FRAGILE UNITY OF THE CDA. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVERS ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE DURABLE JUSTICE MINISTER CAN WEATHER THE SOTRM, CITING HIS EMOTIONAL APPEAL AND THE DUTCH LOVE FOR THE UNDERDOG. IF VAN AGT DOES SUCCEED IN BRINGING MENTEN BACK TO TRIAL, HE MAY STILL BE ABLE TO TURN THE AFFAIR TO HIS POLITICAL ADVANTAGE.
MCCLOSKEY

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